WORKFORCE STRATEGY CENTER

A NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT CONSULTING FIRM

# Policy Brief: Workforce Strategy Center Comments on President Bush's Call for Community-Based Job Training Grants

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After careful review Workforce Strategy Center has articulated a policy assessment of President George W. Bush's Community-Based Job Training Grants initiative.

WSC called the $250 million Community-Based Job Training Grants plan right on track by emphasizing:

**A Strong Role of Community Colleges in Workforce Development:** All available research demonstrates that job training and employment services delivered in association with community colleges has a higher likelihood of instilling the credentials and skill-sets that employers are looking for. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the greatest job growth in the U.S. through 2010 is in jobs requiring an associate degree, increasing 32%. Jobs requiring an associate degree or a postsecondary certification are growing 60% faster than the job market as a whole.

- **A Direct Connection to Business Needs:** Workforce programs have long served the needs of training organizations, not the specific needs of employers. The Bush plan rightly calls for training designed around current business skill needs.
- **Programs that are Regionally Developed**: President Bush correctly situates workforce development at the local level. The goal is to allow regionally-rooted colleges to learn the local marketplace and produce training programs and curriculums that are keyed into local hiring needs. This was underscored by the President's community college visits in Arizona and Ohio—two states with college systems highly attuned to these new business and college trends.

WSC stated that overall the President's plan will move workforce in the right direction, but issued a set of challenges that community colleges and peer institutions must overcome to achieve greater success:

- **Colleges Require Greater Internal Coordination:** Before community colleges can take advantage of these grants many must overcome internal obstacles. Of paramount concern is the separation within college walls of job training for low-income job seekers, business contract training, and traditional academic courses. This lack of coordination makes it difficult to link job seekers with the right courses, or businesses with the right training curriculum. Integration is critical to placing people into available jobs and to putting the Bush dollars to effective use.

- **Colleges Must Build Stronger Relationships to Business:** The Bush proposal rightly demands joint planning with local businesses and chambers of commerce. Some colleges have begun doing this, but too many still do not consider employer engagement central to their efforts.
- **Colleges Need Bridges to Local Workforce Systems:** Currently, most states operate parallel systems: colleges and universities on one side and training and employment programs on the other. A state may have a strong college system and a strong set of employment programs, but without coordination of the two, the proposed federal dollars will not stretch very far.

In pockets throughout the country, WSC found a number of standout institutions that could effectively use the Bush workforce dollars and serve as models for future programs. They include:

- **California**: *Skyline College* has developed an initiative with Genentech, the nation's second largest biotech employer, and the San Mateo Workforce Investment Board have trained 100 former airline workers who lost their jobs as a result of September 11 for career track employment in biotech and pharmaceutical manufacturing. Seventy-six percent of the students who completed the first class offered by this initiative in July are currently employed at Genentech in positions paying $30,000-$40,000 a year.
- **Wisconsin**: *Madison Area Technical College* is developing an initiative for the manufacturing and health sectors that will pilot two key innovations: (1) a program that will for the first time offer college credit for courses in basic academic skills that lead to career pathways; and (2) a funding model that integrates federal workforce, Pell grant and work-study funding in support of a career pathways initiative. This initiative is viewed by the Wisconsin Technical College System and key policymakers in the Midwest as a model for the state and region.
- **New Jersey:** Contract education staff and academic faculty at *Bergen Community College* are developing a manufacturing training initiative to both support the county's robust manufacturing sector and provide employment opportunities and career advancement to the college's students.
- **Michigan:** Faculty at *Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, Michigan* developed a 16-week "bridge to technology education" program that prepares adults recruited from inner-city Detroit for entry-level skilled jobs and post-secondary training in manufacturing and other technology fields. The curriculum integrates competencies from technology, mathematics, communication and "career entrepreneurship."

WSC helps community colleges function more effectively as workforce institutions. This policy review draws on the findings and lessons of WSC's influential report **Building a Career Pathways System: Promising Practices in Community College-Centered Workforce Development** (October 2002) and on current work with policymakers and over 20 colleges in several states including New York, California, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri and Illinois. All WSC reports and other program examples can be found at www.workforcestrategy.org